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ABSTRACT

The use of prepositions, past tense verb forms, and subject-verb agreement in the English of a Korean college student of English for foreign students is analyzed in the context of Krashen's Monitor Model theory of language acquisition. The student was interviewed, asked to give a free writing sample, asked to read his own writing, and asked to rewrite his composition. It was predicted that because subject-verb agreement and regular past tense have "learnable" rules, the student would use his language "monitor" and increase his accuracy of usage of these forms. It was also hypothesized that, because the rules for prepositions are not learnable, he would attempt to monitor but would decrease his accuracy of usage of this complex form without knowledge of the rules. Results suggest that, in keeping with the Krashen model, the student did use his monitor with grammar points that have learnable rules and was not able to use it in the case of unlearnable rules. (MSE)

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THE MONITOR MODEL: MORE EVIDENCE *

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We often say we "know" or have "learned" a second language, but these terms do not describe how well (or even if) we can actually speak or communicate in that second language. How do we "know" the language? Does "knowing" imply fluency or some unspecified level of competence? Also, what do we do when we "learn" a language? Stephen Krashen, in his Monitor Model theory, addresses and answers these questions by positing that second language learners "get" language through acquisition and conscious learning.

According to Krashen, a person acquires language through natural, meaningful communication in the target language. The key to acquisition is natural communication during which the second language learner receives intake which is exposure to a comprehensible variety of the target language. Acquirers need not have any conscious awareness of grammar and syntax rules, and if they self-correct, they do so on the basis of what feels right.

On the other hand, conscious learning includes the learning and application of explicit rules. Correctness of form is more important than content; error correction helps the learner internalize rules so s/he can apply them when and where needed. Some rules are not "learnable," though, (i.e. they are not simple and easy to remember) so the second language learner must acquire them. Those rules that are "learnable" are those which the second language learner is able to monitor for.

* This paper was written under the direction of H.D. Adamson, the author of the preceding article in this volume. The results of this paper lend support to Dr. Adamson's interpretation of the Monitor Model.

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Krashen's Monitor Model claims that conscious learning comes only through a person's use of the Monitor. In other words, internalizing and applying rules for correctness is not a natural process. It occurs outside of and in addition to the natural process of language acquisition. Krashen further asserts that for the Monitor to work, two conditions must be present. First, there must be time for the person to monitor. Second, the person must focus on correctness and form and not just on content. Time alone is usually not sufficient to trigger the use of the Monitor as a study by Krashen, Butler, Birnbaum, and Robertson (1978) proved. Krashen suggests, then, that it may take a very special kind of task to force second language learners to use the Monitor.

The present study, which measures a Korean student's use of prepositions, past tense verb forms, and subject-verb agreement in English in four different tasks, tends to support Krashen's theory.

The Study

Research hypothesis: Because subject-verb agreement and regular past tense have "learnable" rules, i.e., simple rules that can be easily remembered, the subject will use his Monitor and increase his accuracy of usage of subject-verb agreement and regular past tense forms. On the other hand, because the rules for preposition use are not learnable, the subject will attempt to monitor but will decrease his accuracy of preposition use since he does not know the very complex preposition rules.

Null hypothesis: There will be no difference in the accuracy of the subject's use of prepositions, subject-verb agreement, and regular past tense in different language use contexts.

The subject: Kim is a 25 year old Korean male who has been in the United States for five years. He completed high school and two years of college in Korea before coming to the United States, and in the past five years he has studied English in night classes. This year he is a full-time student at George Mason University where he is taking English for foreign students and courses in biology, his major. He considers himself "generally fluent" in

English, but he also realizes he needs "more English Study."

The process: After getting acquainted with Kim and making him comfortable with me, I turned on the tape recorder and asked Kim to tell me what he had expected the United States to be like, and how what he had experienced differed from his expectations. We also discussed what he had done since his arrival in the United States, and what he planned to do in the future. After the interview, I asked him to free write about the things we had just discussed. Since he had been taught to free write in his freshman composition class, he was able to write for a while to get ideas down and not to worry about accuracy or form. When he finished writing, I asked him to read into the tape recorder what he had written. Finally, I made a copy of his free writing and returned the original to him with instructions to rewrite, edit, and correct what he had written. I received his edited writing a week later.

Data gathering: I first transcribed the oral interview and Kim's reading of his free writing. Secondly, I went through both transcripts and both of Kim's written drafts and identified all obligatory contexts for prepositions, regular past tense, irregular past tense, and subject-verb agreement. After identifying all obligatory contexts for each of the four items to be measured, I scored each context with a 2 for correct item, 1 for incorrect item, and 1 for no item supplied. To get the accuracy score, or index, for each item in each context (interview, free writing, reading, and edited writing) I added up the scores (2-0) for each numerator and then doubled the number of obligatory contexts for the denominator. Because there were so few uses of regular past tense in Kim's free writing and his reading, I have chosen not to include those contexts in my data analysis. In addition, I have chosen not to include irregular past tense in my data analysis because slightly over 59% of all of Kim's irregular past tense verbs are "was." When discounting this repeated verb, I have too few remaining irregular verbs of too small a frequency to analyze. I have looked, then, at his use of prepositions, his subject-verb agreement, and his regular past tense forms in speaking and edited writing and have constructed the following indexes of accuracy.

	Prepositions	
Interview	150/160	(.94)
Reading	49/54	(.90)
Free Writing	62/66	(.94)
Edited Writing	64/76	(.84)
	Subject-Verb Agreement	
Interview	163/176	(.93)
Reading	50/56	(.89)
Free Writing	47/54	(.87)
Edited Writing	77/78	(.98)
	Regular Past Tense	
Interview	18/44	(.41)
Edited Writing	10/10	(1.0)

Data Analysis: Krashen says that some grammatical items cannot be learned and have to be acquired simply because there are not specific, learnable rules for their use. Prepositions are among those items that cannot be learned. If preposition use cannot be learned, then the user cannot monitor for correct use, which was apparently the case with Kim's preposition use. Although Kim had been given time to edit and directions to edit his free writing, the accuracy index for his edited writing is significantly lower than that of his free writing. (A chi square test determined that difference to be significant at the .05 level.) He apparently attempted to monitor, but he did not know the correct (unlearnable) rule, resulting in incorrect preposition usage. Similarly, Kim's level of correct use of prepositions dropped slightly, though not significantly, as he read and attempted to edit his free writing.

In contrast, the level of correctness of Kim's subject-verb agreement rose significantly from his free writing to his edited writing. (A chi square

test shows that the difference between the two indexes is significant at the .01 level). Also, although the difference between the level of accuracy of the edited writing is not significantly greater than that of the oral interview, it is still higher. These differences give evidence that Kim did not monitor as he wrote his second draft, and he monitored more when he edited his writing that when he spoke. In addition, his subject-verb agreement was more correct as he read his free writing than when he wrote the first draft. This increased correctness points to the use of the Monitor since he did have time to monitor as he read. That he self-corrected as he read also suggests that he was concentrating on form and correctness, Krashen's second criterion for use of the Monitor. Finally, there was also a significant difference between the accuracy of Kim's regular past tense verbs when he spoke and when he edited his writing. (A chi square test determined the difference to be significant at the .001 level). Again, because the rules for use of regular past tense are learnable, Kim was able to monitor and increase his accuracy in regular past tense when he had time and directions to edit his writing. On the other hand, as expected, he did not use his Monitor as much when speaking.

Conclusions: I think we can say that Kim did indeed use his Monitor where it was possible to do so -- with grammar points that have learnable rules. Also in further keeping with Stephen Krashen's Monitor Model Theory, Kim attempted to monitor his use of prepositions, but he had not acquired the unlearnable rules which would allow him to use his Monitor successfully for prepositions. In short, this study rejects the null hypothesis that there would be no difference in the correctness of Kim's use of prepositions, subject-verb agreement, and regular past tense in different language use contexts. Thus, the findings of this study are further evidence in support of the basic claims of Stephen Krashen's Monitor Model Theory.

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